

IN MEMORIAM
CHARLES SCHWEINFURTH, 1890-1970



November 16, 1970 marks the end of an outstanding era in the annals of American orchidology.

Charles Schweinfurth was born on April 13, 1890 in Brookline, Massachusetts, in one of the oldest and most

historic regions of the United States. During his formative years he attended public schools in Brookline where he quickly developed an intense devotion to various aspects of natural history. While his interest in bird watching and plant collecting started as an avocation, they became the driving force for his whole life soon after graduation from college.

He entered Harvard University in 1909 and majored in chemistry, graduating in 1913 with a degree of A.B., *cum laude*. This was a remarkable achievement, for in his sophomore year he succumbed to polio which paralyzed his right arm. To regain the use of his arm, with a self discipline that characterized his whole life, he soon started daily exercises, aided by his devoted parents. He maintained this discipline almost to his last days. When he was informed by his doctors that he must abandon chemistry, he found a life-long career in his avocation.

Charles' commitment to botany became officially registered on April 5, 1912 when he was elected a member of the New England Botanical Club. He faithfully supported, as well as promoted, its interest, often beyond the call of duty. It was, indeed, a rare occurrence when Charles would succumb to some more compelling business than the attendance of the club's monthly meetings. It was in this same spirit that he accepted the burdensome responsibility of corresponding secretary in 1949, a post he held in the club until 1965, when he had to resign from it due to his doctor's order. His memberships included, among others, also the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Association for Plant Taxonomy, the National Audubon Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the Boston Museum of Science.

Charles had many avocations in addition to his ardent bird watching. During the summer months he enjoyed traveling, since he was greatly interested in the classical aspects of our cultural past. Consequently photography became a second nature to him in recording precious impressions, especially of paintings, sculptures and architec-

tural designs for his leisure viewing at home or for sharing them with others at some later time. During winter months he spent much of his extra-curricular time on writing for local newspapers, as well as in pursuit of winter sports, notably ice skating.

The professional life for Charles Schweinfurth started in 1914 when he accepted a position offered to him by Professor Oakes Ames to tend the living orchid collection at North Easton, Massachusetts. Within less than a year Professor Ames, recognizing Charles' great ability for remembering scientific names and fine details, took him on as a personal assistant to work in his private "Ames Botanical Laboratory", also in North Easton.

It was then that his orchidaceous career started. From January, 1915, Charles Schweinfurth was an orchidologist. He worked intensively on the orchids of the Philippines, those from Mt. Kinabalu, British North Borneo and various Pacific islands, followed by studies of the orchids of Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama. In 1936, he co-authored with Ames and Hubbard an extensive monographic study, "The Genus *Epidendrum* in the United States and Middle America".

These works alone would suffice to record him among outstanding orchidologists. Charles, however, has built an even more imposing monument for posterity. True to his good nature and encouraged by Professor Ames, in 1922 he accepted an offer made by J. Francis Macbride to write up the orchid family for his proposed "Flora of Peru". He labored year after year and on April 9, 1958, the first of the four parts of his monumental work appeared in publication. This work was the first descriptive treatise on orchids of any Andean country.

Charles, like many of the outstanding botanists, while working on a given project, concurrently undertook others. He accepted the very onerous task of identifying the numerous colored plates prepared under the supervision of Celestino Mutis during La Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reino de Granada, between 1760 and 1817. The first

volume of this labor of love was published in 1963, while the second volume appeared in 1969.

In 1958, Charles attended the 3rd South American Botanical Congress in Lima, Peru, where he was awarded Catedratico Honorario (Honorary Professor of Botany) by Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, the oldest university of the Americas. It was during that year, when he also visited Colombia, that the picture reproduced here was taken by his colleague, Dr. Hernando Garcia-Barriga of Universidad Nacional, Bogota, during a visit to the Paramo de Chipaque.

Charles received another award of Catedratico Honorario in 1962, from Universidad de Cuzco. In 1964, he was honored by the American Orchid Society with a Gold Medal inscribed "For outstanding contributions to orchidology", and on July 12, 1966, he was elected Miembro Honorario by Sociedad Colombiana de Orquideologia.

On November 29, 1965, the staff of the Botanical Museum of Harvard University honored him on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee in Orchidology with a scroll, inscribed as follows: "Fifty years have passed since our colleague Charles Schweinfurth initiated his productive career in orchidology. Dean of the world's orchidologists, like his predecessors Lindley, Rolfe, Reichenbach, Schlechter, Kraenzlin, Smith and Ames, he has made invaluable contributions to our knowledge of the systematics of the orchids of both the Old and the New World. His great number of publications, his elucidation of the intricate structure of orchid flowers, his augmentation to our knowledge of the phytogeography of orchids, his acute powers of observation for minute details, his loyalty and his dedication to his chosen field stand as an inspiration to both present and future students of orchidology. In grateful recognition of these fifty years of service to orchidology, we of the Botanical Museum of Harvard University present this scroll."

The most meaningful event in Charles' life, however, occurred in December 1963, when, after a visit to the Holy Land, he married the lifelong friend of the Schweinfurth

family, Miss Maria Elizabeth Westergren of Stockholm, Sweden. The blessings of this mature companionship he openly cherished throughout the rest of his life.

The orchid world is vastly richer today for there was a Charles Schweinfurth intimately associated with it. And for those few who had the privilege of sharing his meaningful friendship, not only the orchid world, but the whole world was just a little better to live in.

LESLIE A. GARAY

ORCHID HERBARIUM OF OAKES AMES

BOTANICAL MUSEUM

HARVARD UNIVERSITY